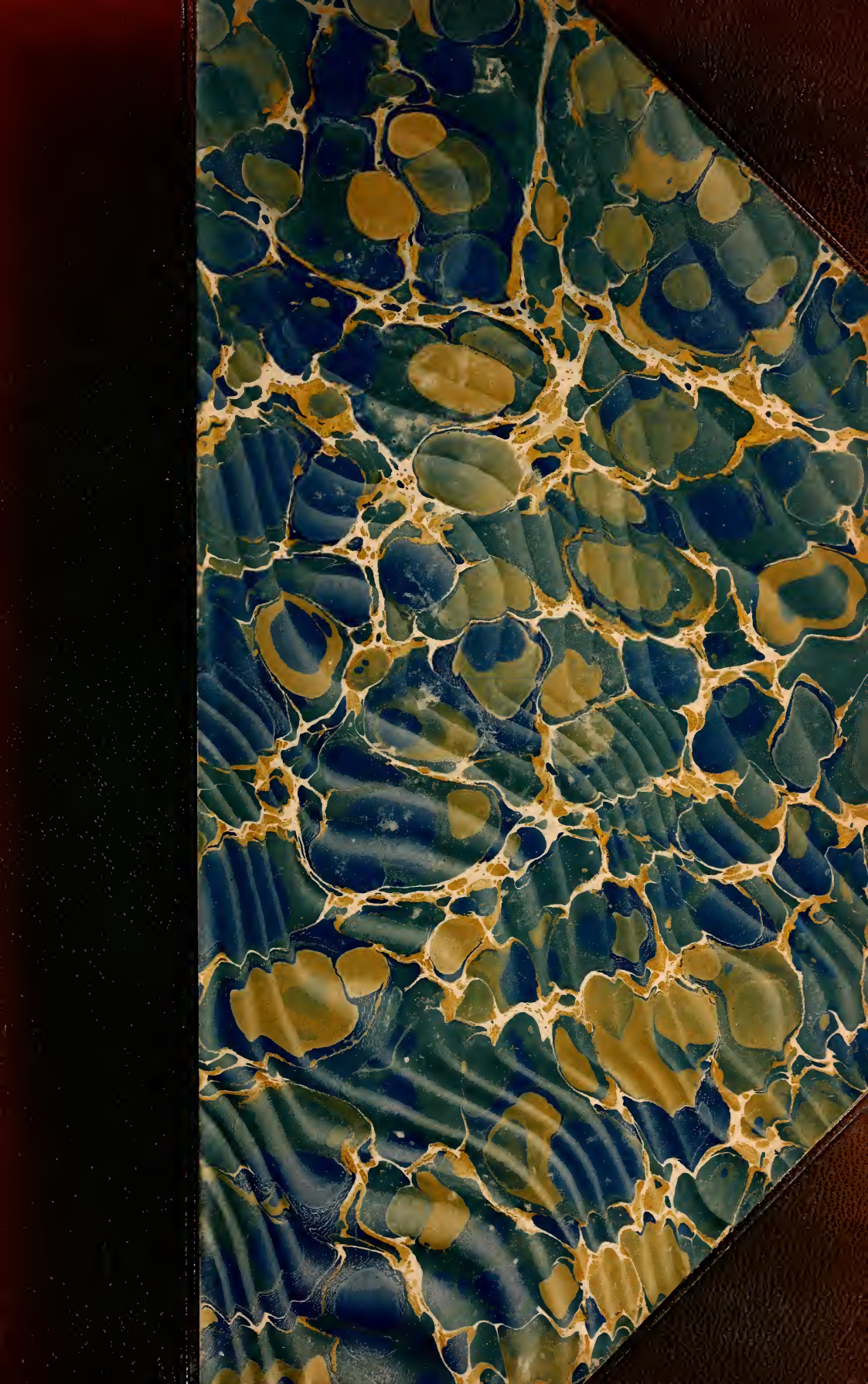

THE NATION'S GRIEF FOR ITS FALLEN CHIEF.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

First Congregational Chapel,

PHILADELPHIA,

Sabbath Evening, April 23d, 1865,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. D. L. GEAR.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

PHILADELPHIA:
RINGWALT & BROWN, STEAM-POWER PRINTERS,
111 and 113 S. Fourth Street.
1865.

PHILADELPHIA, April 25th, 1865.

Rev. D. L. GEAR:

Dear Sir—The undersigned, with many others, having listened, with unmingled approbation, to your sermon last evening, in the First Congregational Chapel, on "The Nation's Grief for its Fallen Chief," and being desirous of having it in a permanent form, respectfully request a copy of it for publication.

We are, very respectfully,

Deacon CHARLES H. OWENS,
Deacon JOHN H. OSGOOD,
CHAS. McCLINTOCK,
WM. T. HUNTER,
JAMES B. MURRAY,
HENRY SNYDER,
JOHN W. SPRATT, and others.

PHILADELPHIA, April 26, 1865.

GENTLEMEN:—The sermon you have requested of me for publication, is submitted to your disposal. I scarcely need say, what every reader will discover for himself, that it was written in the greatest possible haste, a large part of it in the afternoon of the Sabbath in the evening of which it was preached, and goes to the printer without the slightest revision. Nevertheless, its simple and unadorned thoughts I believe to be truthful and not untimely, and, therefore, unfinished and imperfect as I know it to be, yield it to your kind solicitation.

With great respect,

D. L. GEAR.

To Messrs. C. H. Owen, J. H. Osgood, C. McClintock, and others.

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SERMON.

Howl, Fir Tree, for the Cedar is Fallen.—ZECHARIAH xi. 2.

In the days of the Prophet, the Cedar tree was the chief of the forest. It was tall, fragrant and durable. We read of one that was one hundred and twenty feet round at the top, and thirty-five or forty feet round at the stump or stock. Cedar wood was found fresh in the temple of Untica, in Barbary, two thousand years after it was built. It is on this account that the Bible, which is pre-eminently a book of comparisons, so often makes it the type of great and renowned men, such as the kings and rulers of the earth. This class of men are supposed not only to have pre-eminence of position and authority, but also to be raised above the level of the masses of the people, in spirit, knowledge and power of endurance, that they may be for bulwarks of defence, both to nations and churches when storms of trouble come. This makes a wise and just ruler, like our late President, now gone to a martyr's grave, the confidence, the delight, and the strength of a virtuous and loyal people. The removal of such a ruler by the hand of violence is a national calamity, and therefore a just ground for lamentation. This is the point of instruction in the text. The Prophet was speaking of dire evils, soon to come upon the Jewish people, not the least of which would be the loss of their eminent and mighty men. The sentiments and emotions with which they should deplore the loss is that of deep, wailing sorrow. This is expressed in the text in a figurative way:—"*Howl, Fir tree, for the Cedar is fallen.*"

I.—LET US ATTEND TO SOME OF THE DISTINCTIONS THAT EXIST AMONG MEN.

There are diversities in the forest, one tree being taller and more valuable than another. There are diversities in the sky, "one star differing from another star in glory." So there are diversities among men, one man towering in noble pre-eminence over his fellow-men.

First—There is the pre-eminence of *intellectual ability*. The idea that all men are born with the same measure of mental capacity is fallacious and absurd. There is a great variety of work to be done, and it requires in some less and in others greater ability to do it. True, the difference that appears among men is often the fruit of greater industry and self-application; it is God's great law in nature, as in grace, that "to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." The idea is that the plodding, persevering man of humble abilities shall, in the end, eclipse and outshine the indolent, inefficient man of greater natural endowments. Still, there is an original difference in the texture and power of the mind given to different men. Our Lord tells us, in the Parable of the Talents, not only that men have diversities of gifts, but that those gifts are *sovereignly bestowed*. God gave "to one man five, to another two, and to

another one talent, to every *man according to his several ability.*" He gave to Milton, Locke, Paley and Sir Isaac Newton a much higher order of intellectual ability than to millions of the race. The mind of Sir Isaac Newton could traverse the heavens, grasp the solar system, measure suns and planets, and determine with the accuracy of mathematical precision the distances of the stars; while the great majority of human intellects, in their feebleness, never rise above the plainest elements of science.

A young man in a British University said to Paley, "What a fool you are to be wasting your time in idleness and dissipation. *You* have talents which might raise you to eminence. *I* have none; and it is of no consequence how I act." Paley took the hint, though rudely made, and rose like a clear light, and shed a lustre on the age and the literature of his nation, and England boasts no son of greater acuteness, perhaps none of wider influence than he.

It is, then, no disparagement to any man that he does not succeed equally well in every sphere. He may be in a false position; he may have undertaken some other man's work. Let him find out his own field of labor, and go to work in it with the ability which God hath given him, and all will be well. God never meant that one man should do all the work and receive all the reward. If He had He would never have given to one man one talent, to another two and to another five. To the late Chief Magistrate of this nation, Abraham Lincoln, God gave considerably more than an average measure of intellectual ability. He was found equal to the grave questions with which he had to deal. As his administration progressed, the loyal people of the nation were surprised and delighted with the mental strength, and the keen logic with which he grasped and cut the gnarled and knotty points of law, government and diplomacy, which the exigencies of the nation thrust upon his attention.

Second—There is the pre-eminence of *official position*. Civil Government is of divine origin. Without it there could be neither cohesion, order nor protection in society. But in order to have government there must be some one to rule and guide the affairs of the nation. The men who perform this important duty occupy a noble pre-eminence among their fellow men. Their position is one of dignity, honor and of vast responsibility. Bad men in all ages have aspired to these dignities, caring little for the responsibilities; and the history of nations is very largely a record of their intrigues, conspiracies and crimes. But there have been happy exceptions to this. Wise and good men have sat upon thrones and swayed sceptres. The God-fearing Joseph was raised to the dignity of the Premiership of Egypt, the mightiest kingdom on earth. The prayerful Daniel was the third ruler in the kingdom of Persia. When Darius came into power he thought to set him over the whole realm. The devout Obediah and the pious Mordecai both lived and did good in positions of official trust, dignity and responsibility. David reigned over Israel in the fear of God, and was a man after God's own heart, because he administered the affairs of his kingdom according to God's will. In the house and amid the palaces of Nero there were saints in office. And since their day pious men have ruled in righteousness and in the fear of God. The truth is, God, in his providence, sends men where there is something for them to do, whether it be into the dead level of society or to the high places of government and power. So long

as they can serve God and their generation in that position, it is their duty to remain. God took David from the sheep cote and placed him on the throne of Israel. He took Abraham Lincoln from the humblest walks of life and made him the chief ruler of this great nation. He fitted him by nature, gifts and graces, for the high position he occupied as the first ruler in the land. He acknowledged his accountability to God, leaned upon his arm for strength, and trusted in his wisdom for guidance. And now that his earthly work is done, it is earnestly to be hoped that he has received the reward of a good and faithful servant in that kingdom of eternal righteousness which no assassin shall ever enter.

Third—There is the pre-eminence of *usefulness*. There are men who live for no end, and have no end for which to live. I had almost said they live in vain; but that cannot be. A man may be a blot or a curse—a blank or a neutral he can never be. Some men are useful in their way, and to a moderate degree. They never rise to eminence or distinguish themselves by any deed of charity, patriotism or serviceableness to mankind. Yet the man whose name shall stand out like a watch-tower on the roll of fame must distinguish himself in the service of mankind. He must be actuated with that noblest of all human feelings, the desire to bless with useful words and useful deeds the world in which he lives. There is no greatness like the greatness of being useful. The great teacher and benefactor of man Himself "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom;" even *He* said, "He that will be greatest among you, let him be your minister, let him be your servant." The way to eminence is the path of usefulness. We all instinctively feel that the man who has labored most constantly and sacrificed the most largely, with no motive but the consciousness of having done good, is the best and the greatest man among us. Matthew Hale was a man of this sort; so was Wilberforce, the advocate of the West Indian slave; so was Howard, who visited the prison to judge its depths of misery; so was Luther, who toiled incessantly to clear away the sediment which the superstition of ages had deposited upon the cardinal doctrines of "the faith once delivered to the saints;" so was George Washington, who fought alike with sword and pen the battles of American independence, and so was Abraham Lincoln, who threw himself into the deadly breach to perpetuate the freedom and integrity of the nation. Such men need not seek distinction and honor. All men agree in exalting them. The day will not be when their names will be pronounced with any other than feelings of reverence, admiration and gratitude, because their's was the highest exhibition of disinterested love and action of which the mind of man can conceive. The names of historians and poets may drop from the galaxy of our national firmament, but the names of such men posterity will not drop, nor consign to oblivion, nor suffer to die.

II.—THE GRIEF OF THE NATION FOR THE LOSS OF ITS GREAT AND MIGHTY MEN—"HOWL, FIR TREE, FOR THE CEDAR IS FALLEN."

First—It is an occasion of grief that the Chief Magistrate of the nation should perish at the *hand of an assassin*. There is no sin like *blood-guiltiness*. It was charged against the Jews as the climax of their crimes that with *wicked hands they had taken and slain the Prince of Life*. Queen Elizabeth exclaimed, "In trust I have found treason." Cæsar fell in the Senate House with twenty-three stabs, given mostly by men

whose lives he had spared, Brutus leading them on. On Good Friday, the 14th day of April, 1865, the day on which the Son of God was crucified for the sins of men, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by the hand of a traitor, for no fault but the greatness of his efforts to save the nation from the plots and conspiracies of its enemies. The crime, in its time, place and method, is black with meanness, cowardice and treachery. Human life is the gift of God, and he reserves to himself the right of taking it away. The only exception to this law is where life has been wantonly taken by the assassin. Murder was the first crime of a social nature committed by man, and the first penal law enacted by God was directed against its repetition, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made He man." The crime of murder is universally felt to be the greatest wrong one man can do to another. All men feel that the assassin is a common foe, and that each is interested in dragging him from his hiding place to the tribunal of justice. The law and the magistrate owe all their protective efficacy to the just horror attached to the crime of murder in all civilized society.

The assassination of the humblest citizen would have been a fearful crime, and would have drawn attention to the assassin. But the murder of the highest ruler in the nation in cold blood, in a public place, and in the midsts of his friends, adds startling interest and turpitude to the sin. It was a ball shot at the heart of the nation. It was a blow aimed at the popular suffrage. It was the hand of a traitor throttling the life of a patriot. It was the culmination of the diabolical spirit of rebellion, saying that the will of the majority, legally expressed, shall not govern; that the honest, straightforward, liberty-loving man whom the people had placed at the head of the nation, should not live to administer its affairs. The man who perpetrated this foul deed is at this moment the first criminal in the land. Up to the time he imbrued his hands in the President's blood, he was but an indifferent stage actor, little cared for and little sought after. Now he is an object of universal interest. His melancholy notoriety is the conspicuity of guilt. A thousand questions are asked concerning him that would not otherwise have been asked. The nation is interested to know the history of his feelings, views and manner of life. Large rewards are offered for his arrest; his trial would attract the attention of the whole civilized world, and his execution according to the law of God,—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,"—would be universally approved. But though pre-eminent, he is not solitary in his guilt. Every man who has hated the person of Mr. Lincoln, talked disloyalty, sympathized with the spirit of murder, or sided with the treason in which it was hatched, shares the responsibility of this horrid crime. I have myself heard even females say, "Mr. Lincoln ought to be killed; they would like to shoot him, stab him, poison him, or they would furnish the means to do so." Such *hatred* the sublime morality of the New Testament ranks with murder, and though these persons might not have actually perpetrated the bloody deed, yet their language, spirit and influence have helped to swell the surging tide of evil which culminated in the black waters of death. It is not for such to wash their hands before the multitude and say I am guiltless of the blood of this just man. No, they are responsible, they are guilty, and God will require it when He maketh inquisition for blood. The instant duty of all such is hearty repentance before God, confession before men

and earnest labor to undo the wrongs of the past by sacrificing self in the interests of posterity.

Second—It is just cause of grief that the President should have fallen by the hand of a murderer, because it is an *infraction of the law of God.* What that law is will appear from the following Scriptures: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For the rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou not then be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."—Rom. xiii. 1–5.

"Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the King as supreme; or unto Governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."—1 Peter, ii. 13–16.

"I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men; for Kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God and our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."—1 Tim., ii. 1–4.

These scriptures teach us that civil government is a power ordained of God for the good of men; that the civil ruler is "the minister of God to terrify and punish the wicked, and to protect and encourage the good; that it is our duty to submit to him and to pray for him, and thus to be quiet and orderly citizens. As a ruler, the late President of the United States was "the minister of God," entitled to the respect, submission and prayers of every citizen. In slaying him the assassin violated the law of God, and, according to these scriptures, shall "*receive damnation.*" He may elude the vigilance of men, but the judgment of God he cannot escape. He is one of the all men who shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive according to the deeds done in his body; and we know that the judgment of God is according to truth.

Third—But is there no relief to this dark picture? There is. The affliction that is now upon this nation has not come without God's notice. The eye that is everywhere beholding the evil and the good, takes cognizance of this. His eye saw the hand that pointed the pistol and sent the death-winged ball to the brain of the President. His eye sees the assassin in his hiding place. His eye sees the tears of the widow and the orphans. His eye sees the nation's grief. His eye sees the path of salvation for us as a people, and in due time he will make it plain. Out of the evil he will educe good, and from this dark calamity shall come lessons of vigilance, lessons of caution, lessons of stability, lessons of justice, lessons of courage, lessons of trust in God. Abraham Lincoln, an honest

man, an exalted patriot, the friend of the poor and the oppressed, the nation's great and trusted friend, has been struck down by a traitor's hand, but the spirit of Abraham Lincoln shall live, and, Sampson like, his death shall slay more traitors than his life. The nation mourns his loss. Its great loyal sorrowing heart pours out its wail of woe for the great and mighty dead. But the nation shall live and pursue its mission of liberty, union and independence. The dead dust of the martyred President shall be the seed-corn from which shall grow millions of patriots and heroes to fight the battles of freedom, and to share the honors of the renewed, regenerated and consolidated nation. God speed the right! Long live the Republic!

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime;
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.
Footprints that, perhaps, another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main—
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, may take heart again."